

Speaker's Bureau Newsletter

Winter 2002

www.utahcancer.org

In the News

Is Breast Cancer in Your Genes?

Linda T Vahdat, MD

I hear remarks like this from my patients quite often. And I spend a great deal of time explaining to them that if they have a few family members with breast cancer, it doesn't mean that the die is cast and they will automatically develop the disease. It's true at this point in time that family history is probably considered the most important factor when assessing breast-cancer risk. However, a number of other factors—including at what age the family member was diagnosed and how close the relation is—make a significant difference in determining a person's actual risk.

For example, the relative risk for women with a mother or sister (first-degree relative) who developed invasive breast cancer in the premenopausal setting or bilateral breast cancer is about 2.0 (about twice that of the general population). And to show you the difference, the relative risk for women with a grandmother (a second-degree relative) who developed breast cancer is lower, about 1.4 (40 percent greater than the general population).

Many people decide that they want to know if they carry a breast-cancer gene. An equal, if not greater, number of people decide that they don't want to know.

It's always a good idea to know the limitations of a genetic test, and the best person to help with this is usually a genetics counselor.

After a woman meets with a genet-

ics counselor, she will decide whether she thinks that a given result will help her. Blood is then drawn and sent to a laboratory for testing; it can take several weeks for a result to be returned. Usually, there will be a follow-up meeting with the genetics counselor to discuss results.

It is important to remember that genetic testing is in its infancy and we still have a lot to learn. If you are looking for concrete predictions, then genetic testing won't help you. However, if you think a positive or negative result will influence patterns of behavior, then it is probably worthwhile.

There are many questions still to be answered regarding the connection between genes and breast cancer. When the answers to these questions are discovered over the course of time, the importance of genetic testing will increase, and test results will provide much more directive information.

Resource

Breast Cancer Task Force

The Breast Cancer Task Force is a group of caring Utahns who are interested in decreasing the burden of breast cancer by increasing awareness, education, and access to screening, treatment and support for breast cancer. This group is united in an effort to offer assistance to enhance the quality of life for those diagnosed with breast cancer through emotional, physical, mental and financial support. The public is welcome to join this collaborative effort at 4:00 every first Wednesday of the month. 2131 S. 1100 E. SLC. Please contact Julie Church for further details. 801.538.7065 or Juliechurch@utah.gov

Reminder

Finding Accurate Information on the Internet

As you search deep into the internet chasm, keep in mind the following tips and tricks for finding accurate health information:



*Be reasonable. Don't believe everything you read. Watch out for buzzwords like "poison" and "conspiracy."
*Beware of "never." Science is rarely absolute.

*Be cautious of one individual's personal story and word-of-mouth reporting. This does not qualify as scientific evidence.

*Look at the source of the information. Professional organizations such as The American Dietetic Association or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are more likely to have credible, reliable information.

*Check the dates. Make sure the information is up-to-date.

*Check it out. Discuss Internet nutrition and health advice with your doctor.

*Finally, Keep in mind there are currently no quality standards for statements posted on the Internet.

Utah Cancer Control Program
PO Box 142107
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2107



Breast and Cervical Cancer
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www.utahcancer.org



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